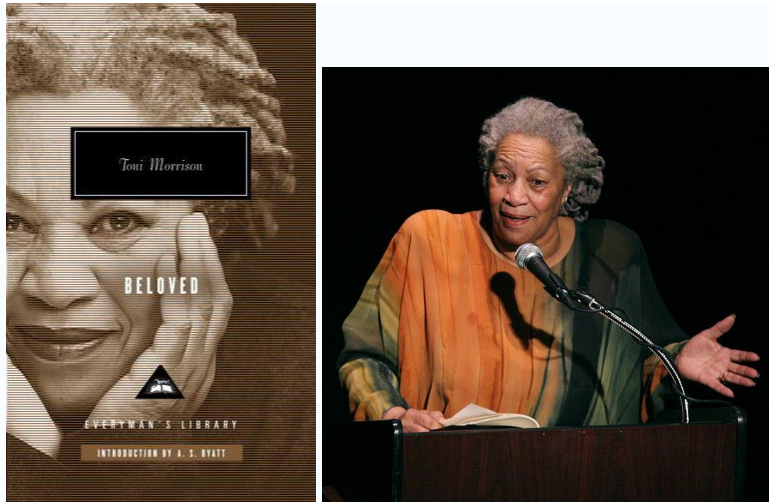


Toni Morrison (born **Chloe Ardelia**^[1] **Wofford** on February 18, 1931) is a Nobel Prize and Pulitzer Prize-winning American author, editor, and professor. Her novels are known for their epic themes, vivid dialogue, and richly detailed black characters. Among her best known novels are *The Bluest Eye*, *Song of Solomon*, and *Beloved*.



Early life and career

Toni Morrison was born in Lorain, Ohio to George and Ramah (Willis) Wofford, the second of four children in a working-class family.^[2] As a child, Morrison read constantly; among her favorite authors were Jane Austen and Leo Tolstoy. Morrison's father told her numerous folktales of the black community (a method of storytelling that would later work its way into Morrison's writings).^[3]

In 1949 Morrison entered Howard University to study English. Morrison received a B.A. in English from Howard in 1953, then earned a Master of Arts degree, also in English, from Cornell University in 1955, for which she wrote a thesis on suicide in the works of William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf^[4]. After graduation, Morrison became an English instructor at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas (from 1955-57) then returned to Howard to teach English. She became a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

In 1958 she married Harold Morrison, a Jamaican architect and fellow faculty member at Howard University. They had two children, Harold and Slade, and divorced in 1964. After the divorce she moved to Syracuse, New York, where she worked as a textbook editor. A year and a half later she went to work as an editor at the New York City headquarters of Random House.^[4]

As an editor, Morrison played an important role in bringing black literature into the mainstream. She edited books by such authors as Toni Cade Bambara, Angela Davis and Gayl Jones.^[5]

Writing career



 Toni Morrison at the Miami Book Fair International of 1986

Morrison began writing fiction as part of an informal group of poets and writers at Howard University who met to discuss their work. She went to one meeting with a short story about a black girl who longed to have blue eyes. The story later evolved into her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), which she wrote while raising two children and teaching at Howard.^[4] In 2000 it was chosen as a selection for Oprah's Book Club.^[6]

In 1975 her novel *Sula* (1973) was nominated for the National Book Award. Her third novel, *Song of Solomon* (1977), brought her national attention. The book was a main selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club, the first novel by a black writer to be so chosen since Richard Wright's *Native Son* in 1940. It won the National Book Critics Circle Award.

In 1987 Morrison's novel *Beloved* became a critical success. When the novel failed to win the National Book Award as well as the National Book Critics Circle Award, a number of writers protested over the omission.^{[4][7]} Shortly afterward, it won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the American Book Award. *Beloved* was adapted into the 1998 film of the same name starring Oprah Winfrey and Danny Glover. Morrison later used Margaret Garner's life story again in an opera, *Margaret Garner*, with music by Richard Danielpour. In May 2006, *The New York Times Book Review* named *Beloved* the best American novel published in the previous twenty-five years.

In 1993 Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Her citation reads: Toni Morrison, "who in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality." Shortly afterwards, a fire destroyed her Rockland County, New York home.^{[2][8]}

In 1996 the National Endowment for the Humanities selected Morrison for the Jefferson Lecture, the U.S. federal government's highest honor for achievement in the humanities.^[9] Morrison's lecture, entitled "The Future of Time: Literature and Diminished Expectations,"^[10] began with the aphorism, "Time, it seems, has no future," and cautioned against misuse of history to diminish expectations of the future.^[11]

Morrison was honored with the 1996 National Book Foundation's Medal of Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, which is awarded to a writer "who has enriched our literary heritage over a life of service, or a corpus of work."^[12]

Although her novels typically concentrate on black women, Morrison does not identify her works as feminist.^[13] She has stated that she thinks "it's off-putting to some readers, who may feel that I'm involved in writing some kind of feminist tract. I don't subscribe to patriarchy, and I don't think it should be substituted with matriarchy. I think it's a question of equitable access, and opening doors to all sorts of things."^[13]

In addition to her novels, Morrison has also co-written books for children with her younger son, Slade Morrison, who works as a painter and musician.

Later life

Morrison taught English at two branches of the State University of New York. In 1984 she was appointed to an Albert Schweitzer chair at the University at Albany, The State University of New York. From 1989 until her retirement in 2006, Morrison held the Robert F. Goheen Chair in the Humanities at Princeton University.^[3]

Though based in the Creative Writing Program, Morrison did not regularly offer writing workshops to students after the late 1990s, a fact that earned her some criticism. Rather, she has conceived and developed the prestigious *Princeton Atelier*, a program that brings together talented students with critically acclaimed, world-famous artists. Together the students and the artists produce works of art that are presented to the public after a semester of collaboration. In her position at Princeton, Morrison used her insights to encourage not merely new and emerging writers, but artists working to develop new forms of art through interdisciplinary play and cooperation.

At its 1979 commencement ceremonies, Barnard College awarded her its highest honor, the Barnard Medal of Distinction. Oxford University awarded her an honorary Doctor of Letters degree in June 2005.

In November 2006, Morrison visited the Louvre Museum in Paris as the second in its "Grand Invité" program to guest-curate a month-long series of events across the arts on the theme of "The Foreigner's Home." Inspired by her curatorship, Morrison returned to Princeton in Fall 2008 to lead a small seminar, also entitled "The Foreigner's Home."

She is currently a member of the editorial board of *The Nation* magazine.